

# **National Executive Committee Deposed: New York Takes Action Against Officials Who Grossly Violated Their Duties Entrusted to Them by the Party, Ending a Scandalous Reign of Terror**

**by Henry L. Slobodin**

Comrades:—

As you will see from the foregoing report of the proceedings of the General Committee of Section New York, that body has at its meeting of July 10 suspended the National Secretary [Henry Kuhn] and six member of the National Executive Committee from their respective offices for incompetence and abuse of authority vested in them by virtue of their offices.

In doing that Section New York has performed a grave and painful but imperative duty. The Section New York has been entrusted by the National Convention of our party not only with the election of the National Executive Committee, but also with the surveillance and control over the actions of the said body and Section New York is accountable to the party at large for the acts and conduct of that most important administrative body.

Our comrades in the city of New York are well acquainted with the long chain of outrageous acts which make up the record of our deposed national officers and their obedient tools, for them the action of the General Committee requires no explanation; but the party members outside of the city of New York have hitherto been systematically kept in ignorance of the actual state of affairs; the editors of our party organs, aided by the suspended national officers, have suppressed every criticism of the administration, every dissenting opinion, every friendly remonstrance or admonition with an arrogance which could put to blush the most brazen of Russian censors, and have filled the columns of our party organs with misrepresentations, distortions of facts, and savage attacks against all members of the party who would not bow their heads in blind obedience to the despotic will of the rulers.

Those party members are, therefore, very little informed of the actual situation of the party and the real cause of all controversies, which

culminated in the action of the General Committee, and to those members, therefore, the provisional Executive Committee addresses this declaration in the first place.

The counts in the indictment against the suspended officers are too many to be enumerated, and we shall, therefore, have to limit ourselves here to only the most salient of them.

### **As to the ST&LA.**

It would be repeating a truism to state here that the path of progress is uphill. The progressive elements in the trade unions have always had a Herculean task when they attempted to introduce into the organizations the revolutionary spirit of New Trade Unionism. There were some whom the long struggle had fatigued and discouraged and the idea of a separate existence appeared to them in a tempting light. Some of the elements that stood for progress in the old trade unions were segregated and the ST&LA<sup>1</sup> was founded. Its promoters have come before the convention of the SLP of 1896 and appealed for its sympathy. They pointed out the fact that there were millions of unorganized workingmen in the United States, and assured that the ST&LA would make it its mission to organize the unorganized. Under the influence of these pledges of the promoters of the ST&LA the convention commended and endorsed the ST&LA in its laudable mission.

The career of the ST&LA has with very few exceptions justified the fears of those who reluctantly acquiesced to it and disappointed those who warmly commended it. Its methods were such as to devote the greater part of its energy and time in forming rival organizations. The promoters of the ST&LA were the leading minds in the administration of our party and the policy of the ST&LA was declared to be that of the SLP. This interpretation of the endorsement of the Alliance by the convention could not have failed to entangle the SLP into a number of disputes of the ST&LA in which the SLP as such had no interest involved. Trade unions that for years had stood by the SLP and contributed thousands of dollars to our campaign and press funds (notably the Cigarmakers' Union No. 90) were bitterly attacked by the editor of *The People* [Daniel DeLeon], only because they objected to the organization of rival unions in their trade by the ST&LA. But the ST&LA itself was to be loved by the SLP only in so far as it was a creature of DeLeon and [*Vorwärts* editor Hugo] Vogt.

The Buffalo convention of the ST&LA [3rd: July 4-7, 1898] could not be controlled by them and immediately upon DeLeon's return to New York the General Executive Board, duly elected at the convention, was summarily overthrown and a new one composed of pliable tools of DeLeon elected against the protest of several Assemblies in this city.

This step of the promoters of the ST&LA has cost the ST&LA the Central Labor Federation, which was the parent body of the Alliance and contained about one-half of the total membership of the Alliance. Still the editor of *The People*, and with him the NEC, continued to regard every expression of criticism of their peculiar interpretation of the resolution of the national convention of 1896 emanating from any party member or party organ as an act of high treason to the party. Of late they went so far as to maintain that a man who did not endorse the Alliance was not qualified to be admitted to party membership. (See the report of the General Committee of Section New York as regards the admission of J. Grunzig.)

In plain words, the NEC and the editors of *The People* and the *Vorwärts* declared that such was the policy of the party to which they would brook no dissenting voice, be it ever so mild and well-meaning.

### **As to Party Discipline.**

We are far from disputing the necessity of maintaining strict order and discipline within the party organizations, but in the hands of our suspended party officers discipline on one hand degenerated into an intolerable despotism wherever their own authority was concerned, and into open anarchy whenever they were called upon to abide by the provisions of our constitution and the rules of party discipline. They turned their committee into a tribunal of inquisition before which each party member or party organization guilty of the crime of having their own opinions on party affairs of minor importance was dragged as a heretic and condemned in a summary manner.

It has been the favorite argument with the adherents of the administration, wherewith to silence objections, that the NEC is an exalted body that stands for and represents all the members of the SLP. And, indeed, it had much weight with the dissenters, who with all their dissatisfaction with the NEC stood nevertheless for discipline and order in the party. It should be expected that the NEC which demanded strict obedience to their authority would be consistent and live up to their own principles. But they did not.

The National Board of Appeals registered several decisions that did not meet with the approval of DeLeon, Vogt, and the NEC. Did they as old disciplinarians submit or appeal from such decisions to the only higher tribunal, the general vote?

In conspiracy with the officers of Section New York they suppressed the decision of the Board of Appeals in the matter of the *Liedertafel*, contrary to the usual custom of publishing all decisions of the Board of Appeals, the object being to disfranchise the *Liedertafel* contrary to the decision of the Board. It then entertained a protest from these officers in the name of Section New York against the right of the B of A to pass upon the question, thus violating Art. V, Sec. 2a, which makes it the duty of said board upon appeal “to settle all difficulties of the party,” and Art. V, Sec. 2b, which declares the general vote of the party as the sole authority above that of the board. The same clause of the constitution was violated when they refused to submit their side when asked to do so by the B of A upon the appeal of Comrade Stahl in his capacity of member of the National Executive Committee for the manifest purpose of preventing the rest of the members of the committee from usurping powers not granted to them by the constitution.

### **As to the Controversy with the *Volkszeitung*.**

Our German daily party organ, the *Volkszeitung*, published on March 7, 1899, an editorial pointing out the burden of indirect taxation borne by the fact that workingmen pay taxes upon articles of consumption was being used by reformers for the purpose of alluring them into the swamp of palliatives. In strong and clear words the *Volkszeitung* warned the working class against the danger of entangling themselves with the mongrel-bread of the reformers who dabble in palliatives, and in unequivocal terms pointed out that the lasting and ultimate relief from the additional burden of indirect taxation is offered by one party only — the SLP.

This square statement which [stands] in accord with the principles of economics as defined by the leading minds of the socialist movement the world over, declared and endorsed in the platforms of the socialist parties of all countries, the SLP of the US included (see plank 8 of the immediate demands in our platform), did not meet with the approval of the editor of *The People*. Officially, it was within his province to take any other stand or to teach any other theory of taxation but that which was promulgated and defined for him by the national convention of the SLP,

although we would be the last to deny him the right to differ on such minor questions as that of taxation from the collective wisdom of the party, as expressed in its platform, and to publish in *The People* over his signature articles in support of his theory, provided they were couched in decent language. But not only has he failed to do his duty as so defined, but he has used the opportunity for promulgating a vulgar theory of taxation which had been analyzed and repudiated by the best writers on scientific socialism decades ago.

The editor of *The People* went still further, and in terms of denunciation arraigned the loyal stand of the *Volkszeitung* as “treacherous and mischievous,” thus arbitrarily taking upon himself the mission of administering lectures, or, as he boastingly expressed himself in *The People*, “spankings to recalcitrant editors,” meaning party editors who dared to interpret Marx and the constitution of the party as they, and not he, understood them. And all that in a tone too coarse and scandalous to be tolerated in the lowest of yellow journals, let alone the official organ of the Socialist Party.

It was the manifest duty of the NEC after that to call the editor of *The People* into account and to remind him that his high office did by no means imply the right on his part to scandalously injure the prestige of the party by arrogant attacks in the party press on other responsible officers and old organs of the party, and the right to call an editor to account if he committed an offense lay with the NEC but not with the editor of *The People*.

Instead of that the NEC not only promptly endorsed the scandalous attitude of the editor of *The People*, but aggravated the same a thousandfold by issuing a long, one-sided, unjust, and abusive statement, using for that purpose the May Day issue of *The People*.

### **The Immediate Cause of the Crisis.**

As already stated, it would be futile to attempt in a hastily drawn up statement to enumerate all the acts of despotism and iniquity of our suspended party officers; suffice it to say that even the most phlegmatic members of Section New York finally awoke to the danger of the situation and in the last election of delegates to the General Committee repudiated the actions and policy of its irresponsible officers by electing practically a two-third majority hostile to the administration.

The leaders now understood that their last hour had struck: with the General Committee of Section New York opposed to them and an

overwhelming majority of the membership of the section behind that committee their reign could not continue much longer. They had foreseen the coming of that hour and had attempted to take measures against it. Fake organizations under the name of English-speaking branches were started all over the city without the slightest justification for such a procedure. The usual purpose of organizing a branch of an Assembly District<sup>2</sup> is to provide an opportunity for members of different tongues to transact party business each in their own language.

This could be the only legitimate cause for organizing branches. There is no excuse for organizing an English-speaking branch where all speak and all business is transacted in English. But that was done by the City Executive Committee, as we proceed to show. What was the object that this sudden zeal had in duplicating party branches?

It was to pack the General Committee. Think of it, socialists, and hang your heads in shame.

Branches were attempted to be organized in nearly all districts of Section New York. In most of them the plan failed, for no members could be found. Arthur Keep<sup>3</sup> constituted himself into a perambulating branch at large and accepted applications for admission to membership in the party — without having the application passed in the representative district. He brought applications to the General Committee from men that existed only in his imagination, but presumably came from the 15th & 17th Assembly District. the 15th & 17th Assembly District protested that it had never received such applications. The matter was hushed up.

DeLeon's district is overwhelmingly hostile to DeLeon and the administration. An English-speaking branch was organized with two or three members — all good Germans — and this in a district where the existing party organization transacts its business in English. Vogt's district turned against him — he, notwithstanding, constituted himself into a separate branch and for that purpose spoke English only. In the 8th Assembly District A. Keep attempted to organize an English-speaking branch, but found none that cared to speak to him in any language. In the 4th Assembly District, until lately the leading district in the city, about a dozen members out of a membership of over 70 retired to form a branch, although all the business in the 4th District is transacted in English. There was one comrade who spoke only Jewish [Yiddish], and he is now in the English branch.

But all these machinations of the ring were of no avail. On July 8, the delegates of all subdivisions presented their credentials and proceeded to constitute themselves into a General Committee. H. Vogt and A. Keep

succeeded in preventing it. The adherents of the administration held a caucus meeting and then it began to be openly whispered on all sides that Tuesday next the NEC would meet and immediately proceed to reorganize Section New York.<sup>4</sup>

All the old districts were to be “smashed.” Hundreds of old and faithful party members were to be “kicked out.” DeLeon and Vogt and the faithful few were to remain the Section New York and in control of the SLP. The sentiment of the country was always created and largely controlled by *The People*. *The People* would continue to shout “traitor,” “fakir,” would declaim about having purified the party; the country would probably be puzzled for a while by the fact that hundreds of comrades tuned out all of a sudden to be traitors and fakirs. There might even come up a protest or two which would be followed by some more “smashing” and “kicking out.” Ultimately the country would, reluctantly but good-naturedly, endorse DeLeon’s and Vogt’s “aggressive tactics.”

But when they discovered that all their plans and machinations shattered against the stern determination of the majority of the membership to do away with the intolerable domination of the self-willed clique, they abandoned all further effort at dissimulation and came out openly and brutally with the argument of the street rowdies — the fist. What followed the comrades will find reported in this issue of *The People*. The foregoing will give to the comrades so much of our explanation as with our limited time and space we could impart. More will follow in the next issue. And after hearing all we have to say, the comrades of this country will, we are confident, emphatically endorse the action of Section New York as the only way left to it to rid the party of a dangerous clique regime which was a disgrace to our movement and was bound finally to ruin the party.

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Acting National Secretary.

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<sup>1</sup> The Socialist Trades and Labor Alliance (ST&LA) was an industrial union federation established by the Socialist Labor Party in 1896. In practice it was effectively a dual union to the already existing Knights of Labor and American Federation of Labor, thereby alienating trade union activists already in the field.

<sup>2</sup> Reference here is to state legislative assembly districts, the manner in which the geographically large city of New York was historically subdivided, not to the various assemblies of the Socialist Trades and Labor Alliance.

<sup>3</sup> Arthur Keep was the City Organizer for Section New York, a paid functionary.

<sup>4</sup> Reorganization was a process in which all standing members were summarily suspended and then each forced to reapply for membership on an individual basis. Equivalent terms in other Marxist organizations include "exchange of party cards," "cleansing," and "purge."